



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

## 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



William Hole: Anointing of Jesus, 1906. Public Domain





## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

#### *Prayer of Pope Clement XI*

*Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.*

*I trust in you: strengthen my trust.*

*I love you: let me love you more and more.*

*I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.*

*I worship you as my first beginning.*

*I long for you as my last end.*

*I praise you as my constant helper.*

*And I call you as my loving protector.*

*I want to do what you ask of me:*

*In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.*

*Let me love you Lord as my God.*

*And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.*

*A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.*

#### Catholic **Faith, Life & Creed**

Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham,  
2011. All rights reserved.

Breaking Open the  
Word worksheets  
connect with *Catholic  
Faith, Life, & Creed*  
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by  
TeamRCIA.com and  
PastoralPlanning.com.



## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's Gospel seeks to answer the question: "Who is Jesus?" Jesus is the healer and the one who saves. All are welcomed in the kingdom he came to establish and all are invited to repent.
- ▶ During the Sundays of Ordinary Time the Church focuses on the mystery of salvation and what it means when it comes to the Christian life.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## Reading 1: 2 Samuel 12, 7-10. 13

- ▶ The people of Israel were organized according to tribal confederacies until eventually moving to a monarchical system about ten centuries before Christ. They were reticent to make the shift, as they feared it would result in focusing their attention on the king and not God. God and Samuel conditionally agree to the monarchy, appropriate caution and warning notwithstanding.
- ▶ Israel's monarchy lasted about four hundred years.
- ▶ Today we are introduced to the monarchy of David. King David was at war; his armies were defeating the Ammonite, Syrian and Armenian armies.
- ▶ David became infatuated with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his military leaders engaged in leading King David's men in battle. Bathsheba became pregnant with David's child. David subsequently connived to make sure Uriah would not return from the battlefield.
- ▶ The prophet Nathan approached David and told him the parable of a rich man who had many lambs. Rather than slaughter one of his own lamb to feed his dinner guests, he took instead the only lamb of a poor man.
- ▶ David was furious by such an action and insisted that the rich man be executed.
- ▶ Nathan then told David that he, David, was the rich man in the parable.
- ▶ David could have chosen a woman from his own harem but he chose instead to take the only wife of Uriah.
- ▶ David confessed and owned his sin. According to the Law, David could have been put to death for his actions. God chose instead to give him a reprieve. There would be a penalty but it would be borne by his offspring (a common Jewish belief).
- ▶ David's murderous action would be borne by David's progeny. David and Bathsheba's child would die. The child would bear the guilt of his parents. David's future children would also die.
- ▶ As a result of Nathan's prophetic word, David sincerely repented.





## Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What does the David episode have to teach our contemporary society today?
- ▶ How do you feel about a God who punishes children for the sins of their parents? Is this your image of God? Is this Jesus’ image of God?
- ▶ How might this story invite a response in your life today?
- ▶ What is the good news in this reading?

### Second Reading: Galatians 2, 16. 19-21

- ▶ The letter to the Galatians introduces us to a Paul who is passionate, emotional and aggressive when it comes to his mission. He unabashedly shows his anger and his fearless challenge to the Galatians.
- ▶ Paul was a good Jew who was thoroughly conversant in the Law.
- ▶ Paul insisted that observance of the Law in no way could accomplish what Jesus accomplished through his passion, death and resurrection.
- ▶ The Law by itself could not convert hearts nor did it have the power over life and death.
- ▶ Paul insisted that we are only righteous as a result of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Human beings are not capable of earning salvation on their own merit.
- ▶ The human response to Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection is absolute faith in God, righteous living and witness to the Gospel in the world.
- ▶ Thus we are justified by faith and as a result of Christ’s action and the faith we share, we are compelled to do good works—we can no less in response to the awesome gift we have been given.



## Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ If most of us were truly honest with ourselves we subliminally believe that we have to “do” something in order to be saved—that somehow we have to earn



salvation. What would Paul say about such thinking? What would it take for us to embrace Paul's theology?

- ▶ What does it mean to you when the Church tells us that we are saved through faith and works? Doesn't the latter communicate that we have to earn salvation? If not, why not?

## Gospel: Luke 7, 36-8, 3 or 7, 36-50

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

## Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Today's Gospel reminds us that Eucharist invites repentance and conversion.
- ▶ The meal story in today's Gospel insists upon reconciliation and exhorts all who come to the table to invite others to that same table.
- ▶ The last few chapters of Luke's Gospel focused on the implications of being a community formed by the Twelve Apostles. Throughout Israel's history being formed under the "Twelve" (tribes) expressed a unity in which the Jewish people understood themselves as gathered together as one community regardless of diverse tribal origin.
- ▶ Early Christianity understood the "meal" to express this same understanding of unity. Hospitality, peace and the absence of division were common expectations.
- ▶ The woman's alabaster flask represented the great honor and respect she had for Jesus.
- ▶ She sat at Jesus' feet. When anyone sat at the feet of another it meant that that person was a disciple.
- ▶ When the woman washed Jesus' feet with her hair it was a sign of amazing, committed discipleship.
- ▶ When Jesus ate at the house a Pharisee he was communicating that they too were invited to be included in Jesus' kingdom; they too were heirs of his mission, life and legacy. It remained to be seen whether or not they would respond to his invitation.
- ▶ The Pharisees were blind to the significance of the woman's action. Jesus' was deeply touched by her magnanimous love that was in direct contrast to the lack of love shown by the Pharisees.
- ▶ Jesus told a parable that reflected the organizing principle of the culture of Jesus' day—the client/patron system. The client (employee) was under the control of the patron (employer) and had no options for seeking redress in the face of injustice. The client was totally at the mercy of the patron.
- ▶ Jesus always used his parables to reverse the expectations of the people—Jesus' approach was the opposite of the customary patron.



- ▶ Jesus preached about a world in which the patron provided comfort, care and protection of the client. The kingdom Jesus preached was a kingdom of right order. The patron in the parable offered grace and forgiveness and established right order—unheard of in the real-life experience of the people. The patron made things right. This would have been an “a-ha” moment for listeners as it certainly was not their reality or the expected order.
- ▶ Debts were never paid in full, for even if the debt itself was repaid, the generosity shown to the lender could never be repaid. Thus the borrower was always at the mercy of the lender. Jesus overturns that principle and insists that debts can be repaid. They are repaid through love.
- ▶ The woman showed remarkable, extravagant love. Thus, the greater the love, the greater the forgiveness. Simon showed little love and thus received little forgiveness. The woman showed great love and received extravagant forgiveness.
- ▶ Simon ironically indicted himself with his self-righteous thoughts that if Jesus really was a prophet he would know what a sinner the woman was in the first place. His own words illustrate that Jesus was indeed a prophet since Jesus read Simon’s thoughts and used them against him.
- ▶ The lesson for listeners then and now is the contrast between the woman and Simon. The woman repented of her sins—her response to Jesus was an extravagant, lavish outpouring of love and affection. We can do no less than repent for our sins and offer magnanimous love, praise and thanksgiving as did she.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this gospel teach us about the Eucharist?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about sin and forgiveness?
- ▶ With whom do you most relate—the woman or Simon?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today’s liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

## CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.



## APPENDIX

#1. I thank God that Jesus freely offered salvation to all of us and that I did not or could not earn it—it was freely given. I further thank God that he overturned Old Testament theology of divine retribution visited upon the children of sinners. In Jesus' conversation with the man born blind he told the man that his blindness was not the cause of his parents' sin. In that amazing exchange Jesus presented an entirely different image of God. God is not the judge who exacts retribution. God is a God of mercy.

I am thankful that Jesus introduced us to his Father, the God of mercy and compassion. If the ancient theology of divine retribution were still believed today, I would have to conclude that my child's illness is caused by my sins (many though they are) or the sins of my ancestors. I would not want to know a God who would inflict mental illness on a child simply in retribution for the sins of the child's parents. That would be cruelty of the highest order. Thank God Jesus' introduced us to the true image of his Father. I am humbled and awed by the God who simply loves us and invites us to repent and a God who promises to walk with us in the joys and sorrows of life.

#2. As a Christian my response to the Paschal Mystery is faith in the MYSTERY. If I have such faith I can do no less than shout it from the rooftops; I can do no less than see Christ in the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed. I remember years ago being so touched by the power of God's word to change my life that I diligently prayed for the gift of boldness to teach and preach a just word to God's people.

God answered that prayer and I have been blessed to spend my life in full time ministry. I have learned through the years that such a ministry is as effective as my/our willingness to embrace the Paschal Mystery for the sake of the Gospel.

While the years have not been easy, they have been rewarding beyond imagine. When I join my life to Christ's passion, death and resurrection I am strengthened in faith and empowered to do the works God calls me to do.

#3. I want to relate to the woman in the Gospel and show the type of humiliating love she extended to Jesus no matter the cost or the ridicule it might bring. I want to sit at his feet and be considered his passionate, committed disciple. There are times I am that disciple. There are times that I am the judgmental Simon who is quick to point out the sins of others. There are times that the temptation to be Simon is so great it is hard to resist. It is easy to point one finger at others while the other four are directed at the self.

One Sunday morning a homeless man walked into our assembly. He walked into the sanctuary area, moved to the cross hanging on the wall, knelt down, raised his arms and sobbed before the cross. Not one person walked toward him to offer him God's consolation. His gesture of unabashed love humbled this onlooker. Every fiber in my being wanted to move toward him and put a comforting hand on his shoulder, yet I stood motionless—as did every other member of the assembly.



The broken humanity in our midst knew the source of his life and approached the throne of grace seeking God's mercy. The rest of us stood frozen and we who claim to be the Mystical Body of Christ failed to respond to the broken Christ in our midst.

Rather than welcome him to our table we watched him get up and walk out just as he had processed in. We say that all are welcome to Christ's banquet of love, but are the poor, marginalized, dirty and oppressed really invited?

Simon is an image of those of us who believe we stand righteous before God when in fact we have much to learn about God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness. The woman is an image of those of us who are humbly aware of our sinfulness and are willing to abandon our lives completely to God's care and service. Both Simon and the woman exist with each of us to varying degrees. My fervent prayer is that the woman is given a more prominent role in my life and Simon recedes into the shadows.





# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Faith  
Sin  
Salvation

Sacraments  
Kingdom of God  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## FAITH

Both the second reading and the Gospel are invitations to increase one's faith. Paul insists that our response to Christ's ultimate sacrifice is faith. The woman in the Gospel not only shows her absolute faith in Christ, she shows her unabashed love by washing his feet with her hair. Her faith is an example to every generation of believers. Thus, today we will focus our attention on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

## SIN

In today's first reading David was the epitome par excellence of the sinner. God extended mercy to David and spared his life. The woman in the Gospel showed her love for Jesus and the forgiveness he extended to her by washing his feet with her hair. We are all sinners who are forgiven by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Today's extended session will focus on the mystery of SIN and what the Church teaches about SIN.

## SALVATION

David is saved by God's great mercy and benevolence. Paul reminds us that we are saved by the sacrifice of the cross. The woman is saved by Christ's gift of forgiveness and God's mercy. Today's liturgy invites us to reflect on the great gift of salvation we have been given through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, today our extended session will focus on the mystery of SALVATION.

## KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he shows what it means to live in the kingdom—sharing the Eucharistic meal that expresses our unity and radical lavish love of God. Those who are called to establish the reign of God are to follow the example of Jesus. This section of Luke's Gospel focuses on Jesus' mission to establish the reign of God and prepare his disciples for his absence. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the KINGDOM OF GOD.



### **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.